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ABSTRACT

Designed to be of use to outdoor education centers, camp set-ups, or even public or private schools, this guide to the development of an "hebertisme" site presents the following: (1) definition ("an opportunity to discover one's own potential and limitations in moving about in the natural environment" using a network of natural and manmade obstacles placed in a forested area); (2) George Hebert and the development of a physical fitness training concept that incorporates natural exercises which are functional, useful, and global and performed in the open air); (3) the men who imported Hebert's ideas on physical fitness (Father Raoul Cloutier and Georges Gauvreau); (4) site selection (an accidental terrain of four to five acres including a flat plateau is ideal); (5) site development (an ideal site is one that is very inconspicuous, that has kept as much of the ground vegetation as possible and that has used natural material that blends with the natural environment); (6) the hebertisme design (includes a central plateau, an aerial course, and a ground course); (7) the apparatus (classified as walking and running: balancing; crawling and "on all fours"; lifting, carrying, and throwing; jumping; arm-supporting; suspension; climbing; and the thrillers); (8) material (rope, planks, etc.); (9) safety (emphasis on calculated risk-taking); (10) program and pedagogy (examples). (JC)

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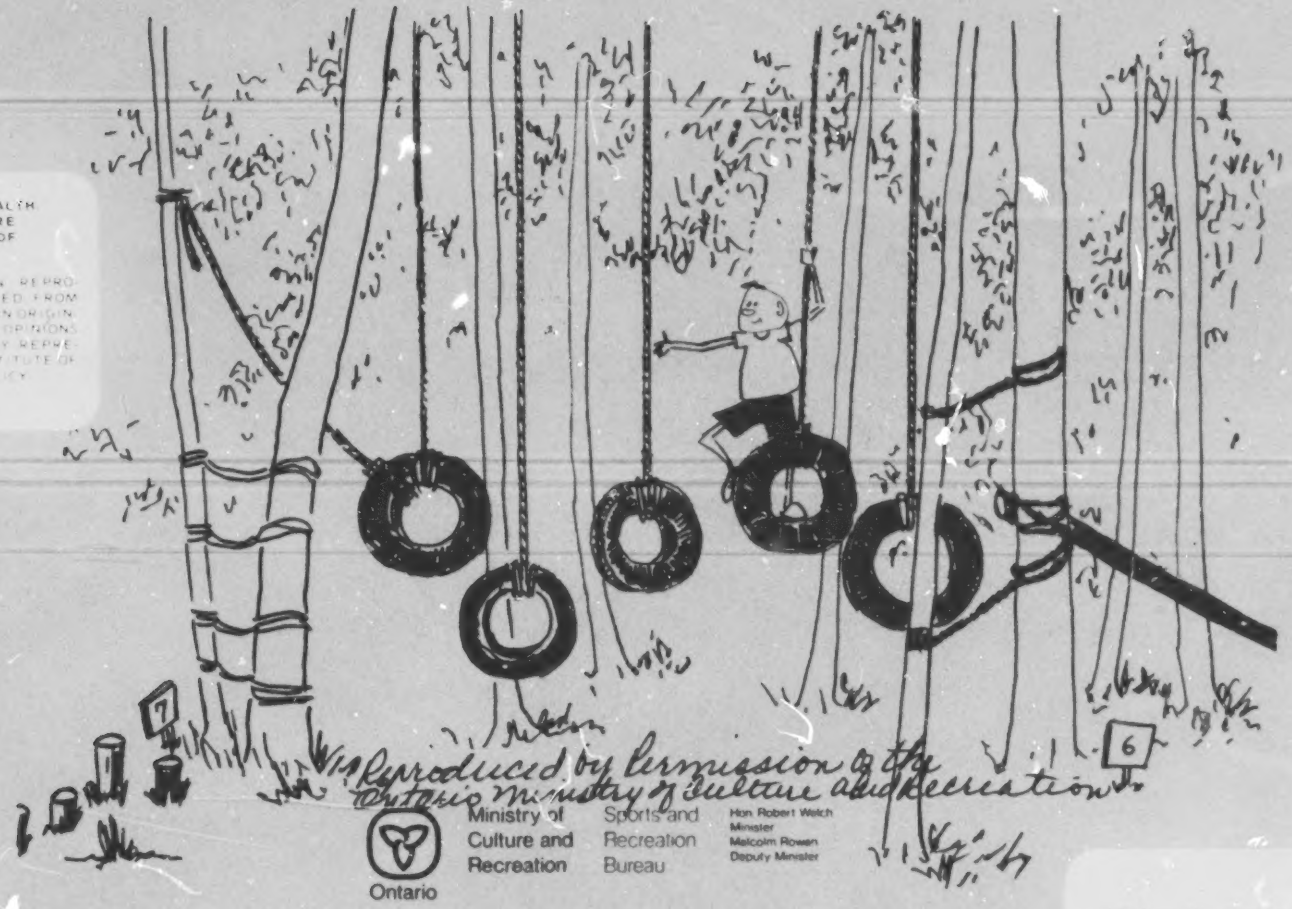

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This booklet was written by Professor Claude Cousineau of the University of Ottawa.

The illustrations were done by Nova Scotian artist, Donald Pentz.

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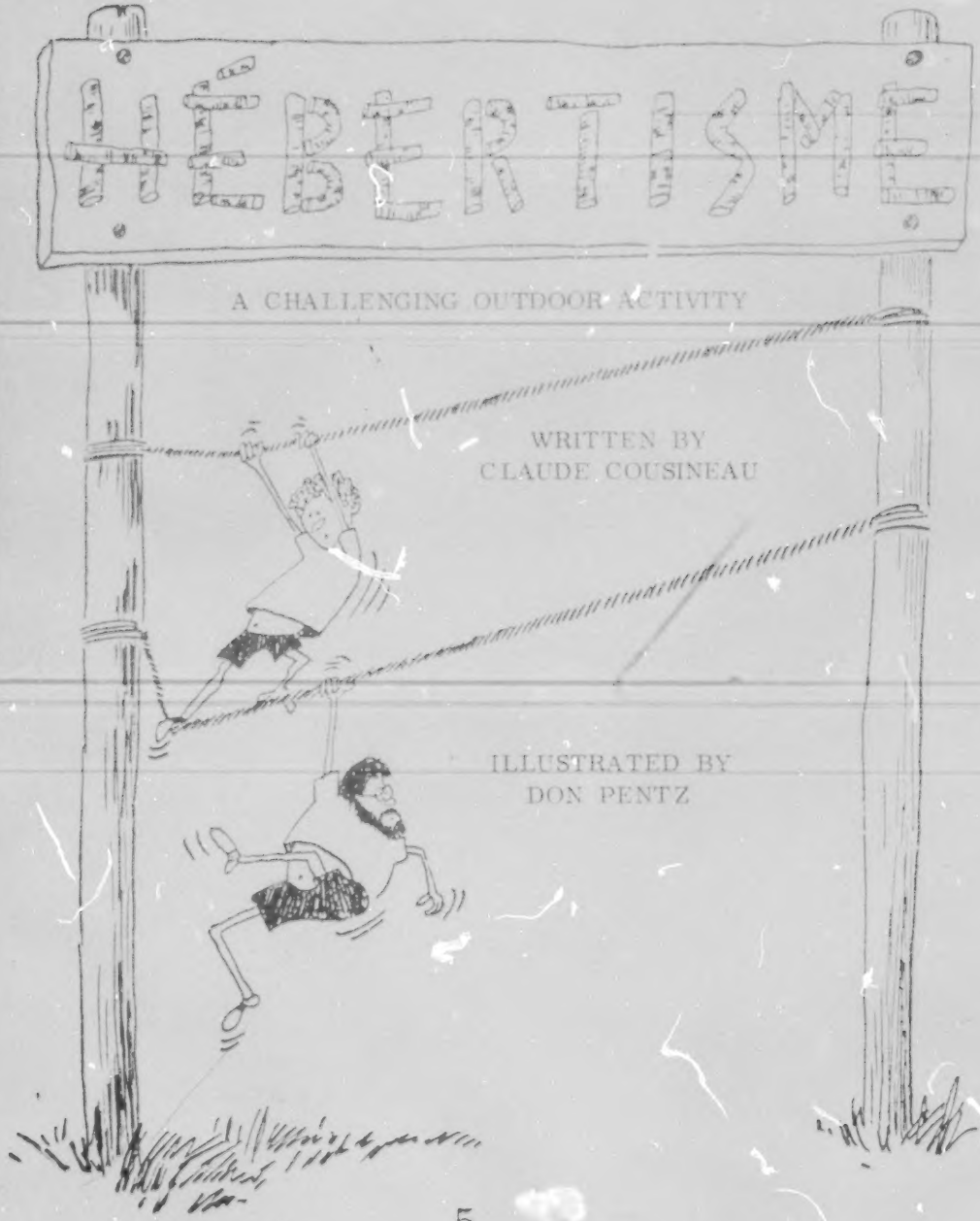

A CHALLENGING OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

WRITTEN BY
CLAUDE COUSINEAU

ILLUSTRATED BY
DON PENTZ

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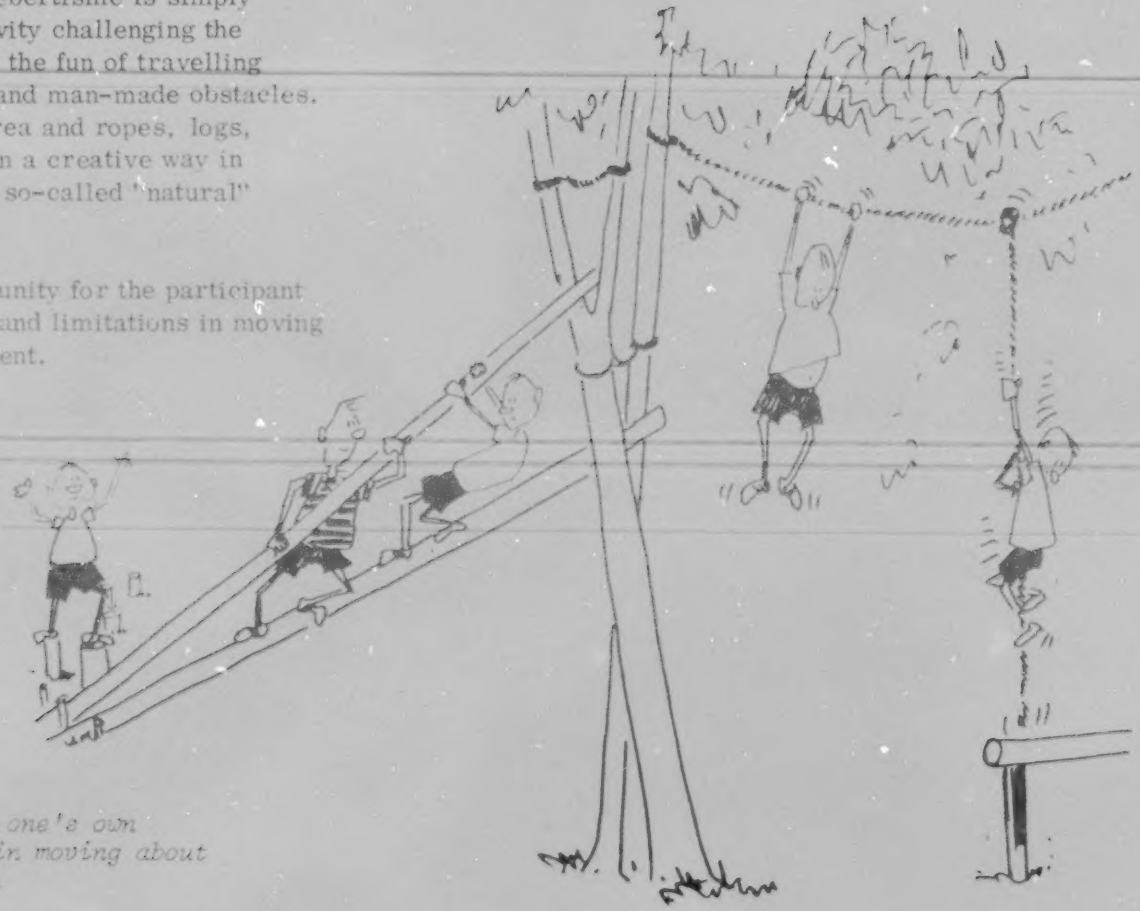
A DEFINITION

In the context of the current trend of education through outdoor adventure, hébertisme is simply another outdoor physical activity challenging the child and even the adult, with the fun of travelling through a network of natural and man-made obstacles. It takes place in a forested area and ropes, logs, rocks and trees are utilized in a creative way in order to provoke a variety of so-called "natural" movements.

Hébertisme is another opportunity for the participant to discover his own potential and limitations in moving about in the natural environment.



An opportunity to discover one's own potential and limitations in moving about in the natural environment.

THE MAN BEHIND IT

George Hébert, the man behind the idea.

George Hébert (from which "hébertisme" derives) was born in Paris, in 1875. He served as an officer in the French navy between 1895-1903. His greatest concern was with the physical conditioning of his sailors. He was considered a fine acrobat at the time and he even performed for the Monlier Circus. His travels across the world took him to the most remote areas of Europe, Asia, Africa and America, which permitted him to make serious observations of the natural movements of the natives.

He later became responsible for the physical training of the French navy. In the year 1913, he gave a demonstration of his method at the French Physical Education Congress. His ability in this field led him to teach in a physical education training institution. These were the years in Europe for the war of methods in physical education: students in the history of this subject would recall Amoros, Jahn, "L'Ecole de Joinville", the Swedish method, Ling's gymnastics, the Demeny approach, etc.

Hébert was opposed to analytical exercises and controlled movements which he considered artificial and purposeless. It seemed irrational to build gymnasiums and apparatus when nature offered so many excuses for physical movements.

In fact, Hébert was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who as we know, advocated

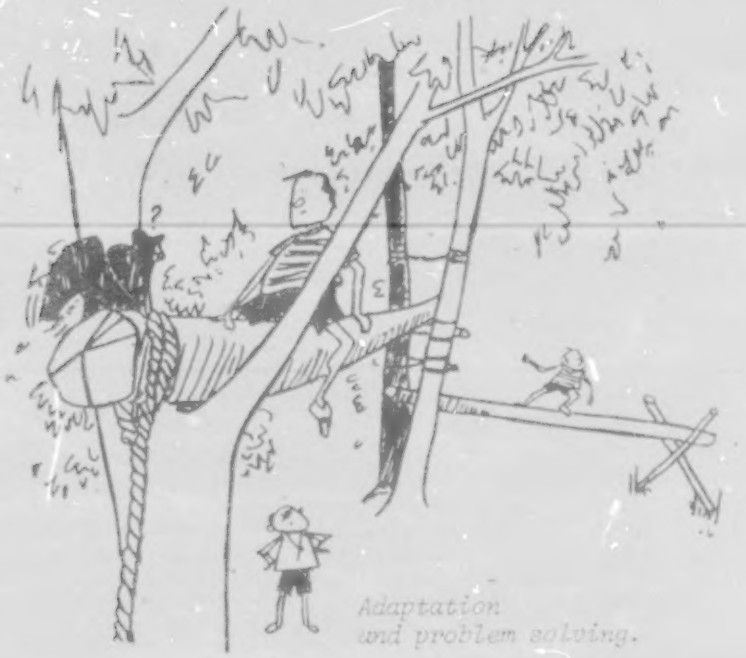
"l'éducation dans la nature". Hébert's view on education was a return-to-nature approach with emphasis on development of "moral values and virile character".

His method of training was qualified as "natural": the exercises had to be functional, useful, global, and the stage had to be in the open air. Everything was based on the fundamental movements of man: walking, running, crawling, climbing, jumping, balancing,

The "natural" movement of man.

throwing, lifting and carrying. Swimming and self-defense were also considered but did not receive as much attention. Therefore, every obstacle, whether natural or man-made with indigenous material, became the essence of hébertisme.

The notion of circuit training was first introduced by Hébert. Professor LeBoulch describes Hébert's method as "the result of a free adaptation by trials and errors, in front of a problematical locomotor situation". He gives the example of a child learning his first steps and eventually progressing to the very precise movements of a ballet dancer. It is the acquisition of body autonomy.



Adaptation and problem solving.

THE MEN WHO IMPORTED IT

Captain Cloutier, the man who imported the idea of hébertisme and adapted it for children's fun.

Credit must go to Father Raoul Cloutier and Georges Gauvreau. Both were officers in the Canadian army and fought in World War II. Being stationed in France, they became familiar and very enthusiastic about physical education as it was then applied in France.

They focused their attention mostly on Hébert's method. Even after the war, Gauvreau remained in France to do further study of "la méthode naturelle d'Hébert".

In 1949, Captain Cloutier and Gauvreau founded Camp-Ecole Trois-Saumons, which is located 70 miles east of Québec City. One of the first activities to be implemented was hébertisme. To our knowledge it was the first "piste d'hébertisme" to be introduced in North America.

Today, over 75 such set-ups are found across the province of Québec. They are located mostly in summer camps but it is interesting to note that a few schools and playgrounds, which happened to have either a ravine or bushed area nearby, have also developed such a facility.

During the sixties we have witnessed throughout North America various applications of this concept: the fitness trail in some parks, the obstacle course as a game played indoors as well as outdoors, and the rope course popularized by the Outward Bound Schools.

Whether or not those variations are direct outcomes of Hébert's original thinking remains to be studied.

THE SITE

In outdoor education centres or camp set-ups, the hébertisme site should be easily accessible to the user and, yet, secluded enough to create an atmosphere of fantasy. For little Johnny it is a place to become Tarzan in the jungle or to play Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest. For the adult, it's an opportunity to live again these things we used to do when we were kids. The site should be so designed as to create not only a kinetic experience but also an emotional one, a new experience.

An accidented terrain of four to five acres including a flat plateau seems ideal. Factors of drainage and soil-carrying capacity must be considered. A full-grown hardwood forest area is preferable as the trees can be used to fix the apparatus. The trees also provide shade and prevent erosion. This type of forest is usually not as infested with insects as some coniferous areas might be.

A place to be, a world of fantasy.

DEVELOPMENT

Before starting any clearing or construction, it is strongly advised that a blown-up map of the area selected be obtained. First, illustrate the outstanding natural features of the site such as creeks, ravines, open areas, boulders, largest trees, etc. Second, map the entrance, the needed open areas, the fixed apparatus and the trail network.

This type of master plan would suggest the development of a site in stages where, for the first year, certain zones would be developed and the rest in the subsequent years. It makes things much easier when the time comes to establish the cost of material and the man-power necessary. The total cost and energy is spread over a number of years.

It is to be expected that it should take three to five years to complete a satisfactory hébertisme site. This period, of course, can be reduced if the agency can hire a few carpenters. But most hébertisme sites have been developed by the program staff of the agency involved. Also, if the participants are old enough, they can contribute by conceiving and constructing some apparatus; this not only helps to develop the site but is also a significant learning experience.

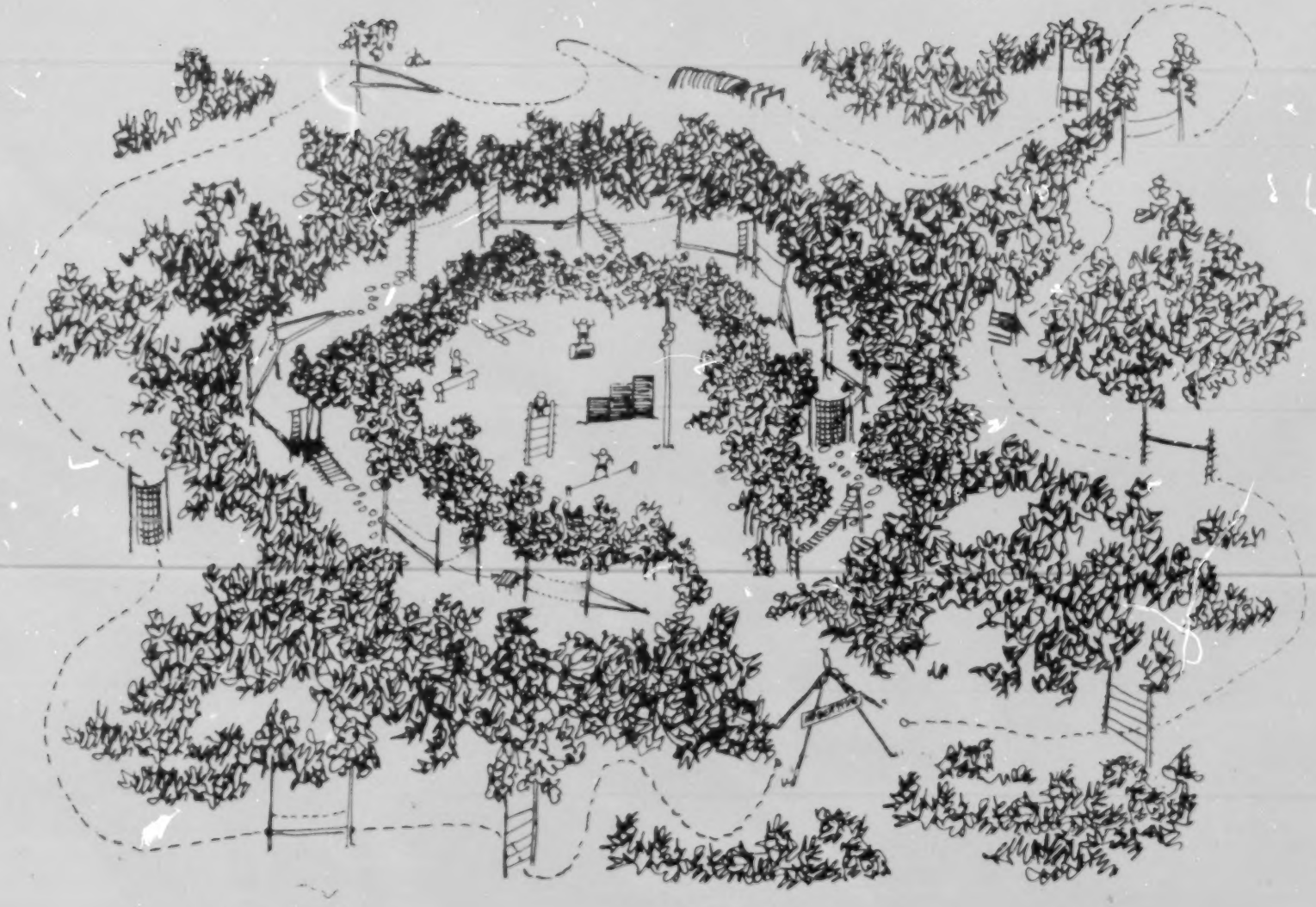
It is only by trial and error that a well-balanced site can be achieved; shifting around and adjustment of apparatus will inevitably become necessary.

Conservation principles must prevail in the construction of such a facility. Nails in trees should be avoided; the bark of the trees should be protected when securing the apparatus to their trunks and as many branches and shrubs as possible should be retained.

The aesthetic dimension should also be considered. Without proper selection of material, such a site could look rather junky. Use of rubber tires, bright colors, large signs, yellow plastic rope, steel pipes, etc. should be discouraged or used in a very discreet manner.

The ideal site is one that is very inconspicuous, that has kept as much of the ground vegetation as possible and that has used natural material that blends with the natural environment. It should not resemble a playground and, even less, a circus mid-way.

MASTER PLAN



THE DESIGN

Three zones can be identified in a hébertisme site: a central plateau, an aerial course and a ground course.

The central plateau is usually a cleared area where individual apparatus are placed for the purpose of learning and practicing a few basic skills in balancing, climbing, throwing and jumping. It is common to see apparatus such as low guy-wires, balance beams, barrels, stilts, long-boards, jumping platforms, chinning poles, climbing walls, horizontal beams and ropes, etc. This plateau may also include some thrillers such as the ever-popular Tarzan swing rope, a cable car or a high rope-bridge.

This area is also used for team initiative tests where a group may be challenged to climb over a 12-foot wall, or move a log and the team over a given distance without touching the ground (using rocks, trees and the log).

The aerial course, usually surrounding the central plateau, consists of a series of apparatus all connected with each other, numbered and used in a sequential manner. It is designed to enable the participant to travel from tree to tree without touching the ground; a variety of ingenious ways can be used to make a connection: lashed logs, pegs in the ground, series of rocks, rope bridges, rope ladders, suspended tires, etc. It can be as daring and difficult as the designer wishes it to be; this should vary with the type of participants who will use the course. Consideration to alternating the type of physical work required should be given; for example, there should not be two apparatus in a row where suspension with arms is necessary. As a matter of fact, suspension work in an aerial circuit should generally be avoided if older girls are to use it.

No matter who the participants are, the course should offer enough challenges and thrills, but at the time enable the majority to complete the course on the first trial.

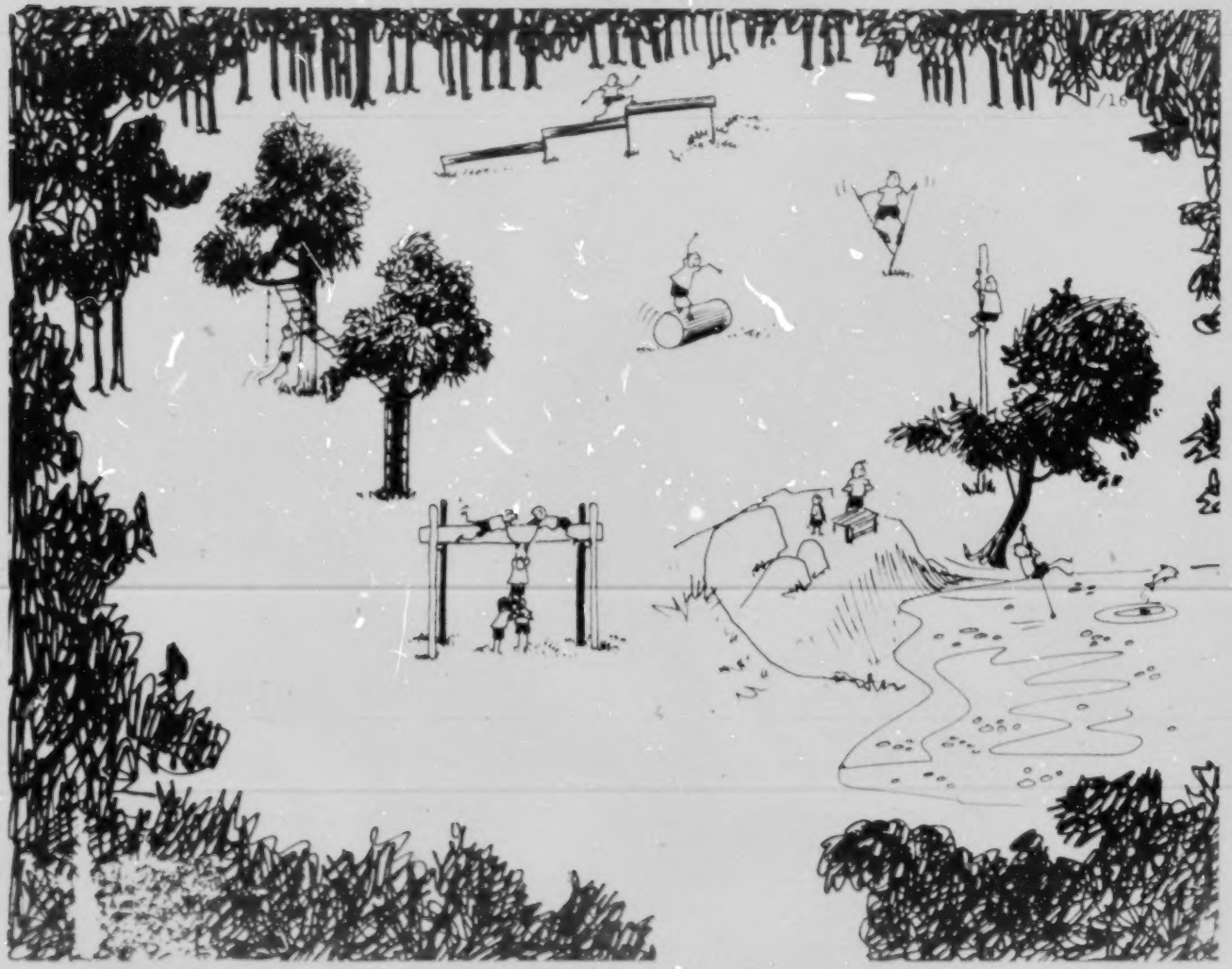
Between 15 and 25 connected apparatus should provide an interesting circuit and should take the novice 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

The ground course consists of a trail about half a mile to two miles long that surrounds the plateau and the aerial course; every 50 yards or so, an apparatus is placed to provoke mostly jumping, crawling, balancing and dodging.

The usual apparatus on such a course are: pegs in the ground, a waist-high balance beam, a transversal beam (jumping), step-in tires, slalom poles, a tunnel, hurdles, etc. This course is accomplished while jogging and each apparatus should be designed not to slow down the speed of the participants; otherwise, when used by a group, it creates a line-up situation and disturbs the rhythm and continuity of travel.

With the years, more loops with obstacles can be added to the main trail and therefore offer more alternatives and greater challenges.

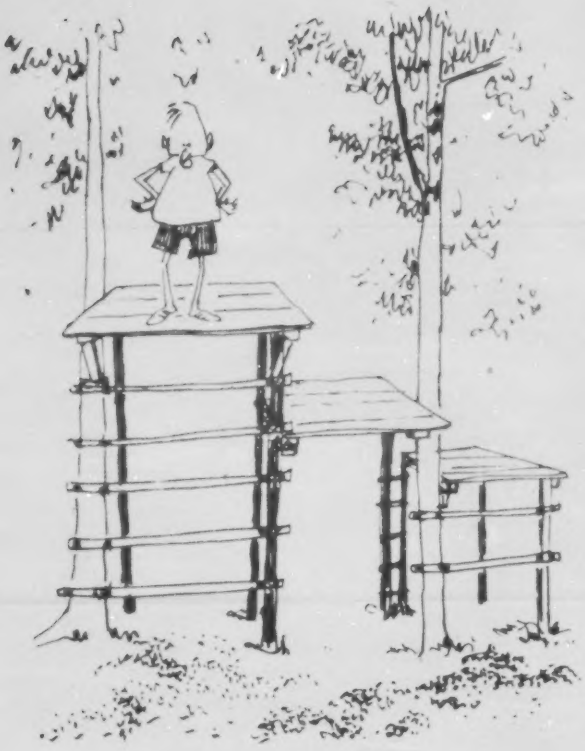
CENTRAL PLATEAU



Learning the basic skills of balancing.

Becoming at ease in climbing.

The fun of just being up there.

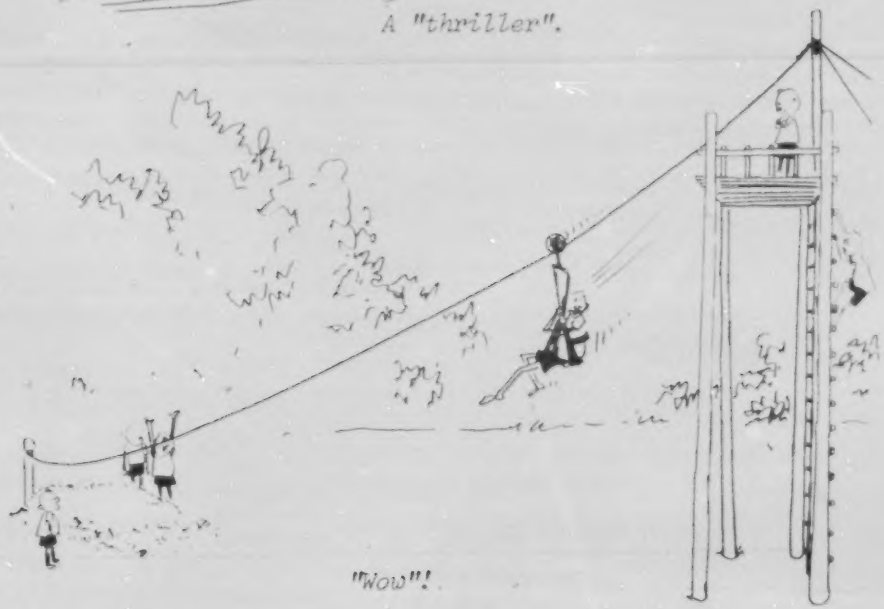


"Land like a cat"!?!

Walking on the "pegs".

Balancing with an additional problem.

A "thriller".



"Wow"!

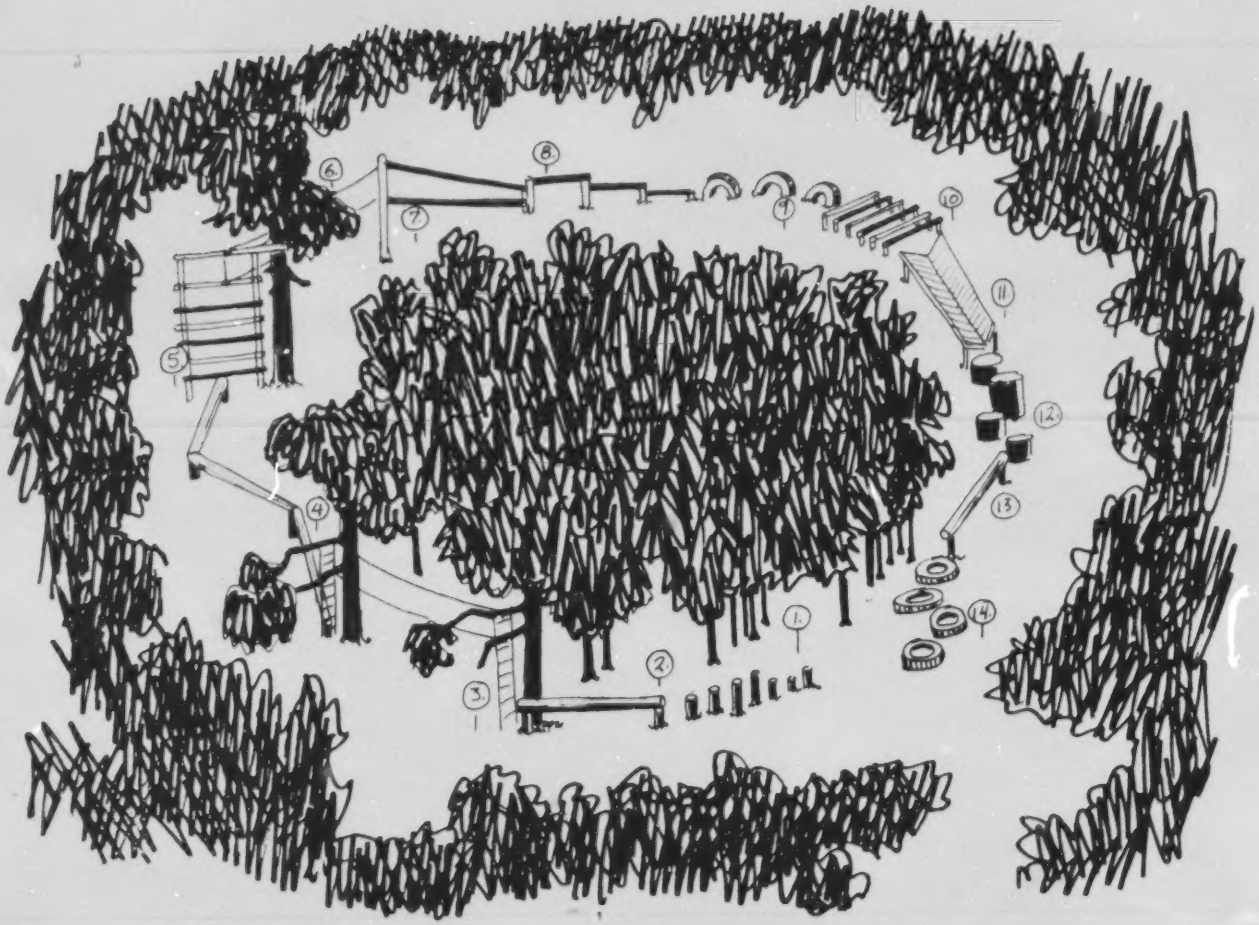
30

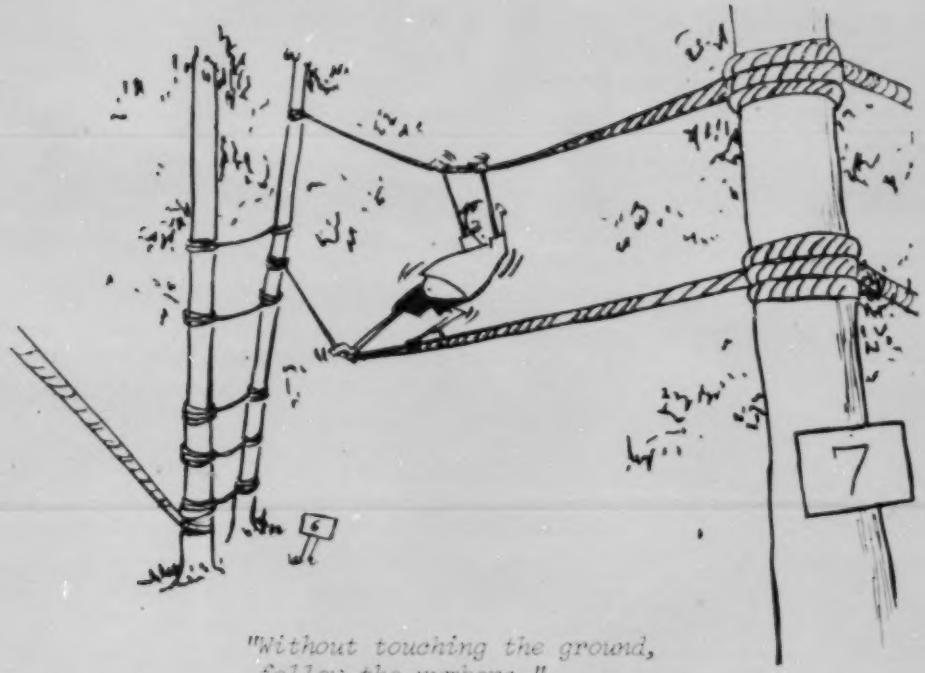
12

"Ya-a-oo....."

31

AERIAL COURSE

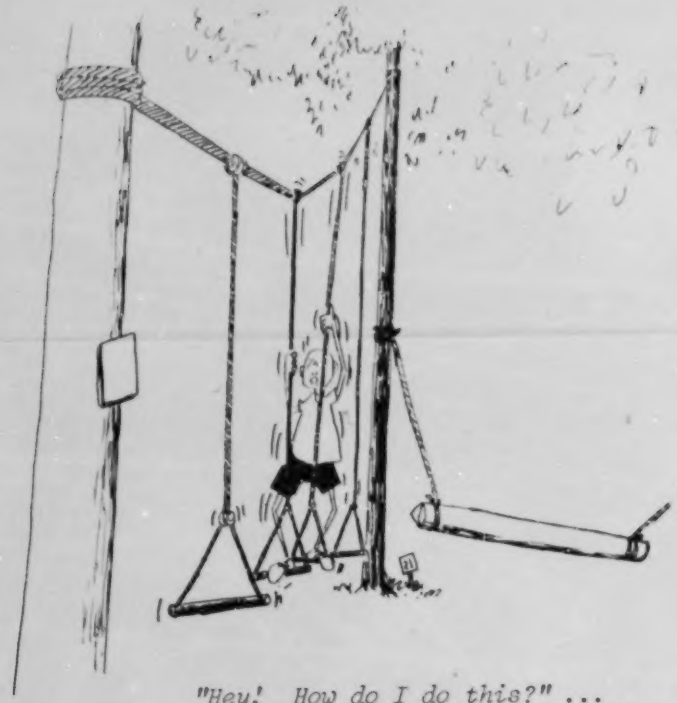




"Without touching the ground, follow the numbers."

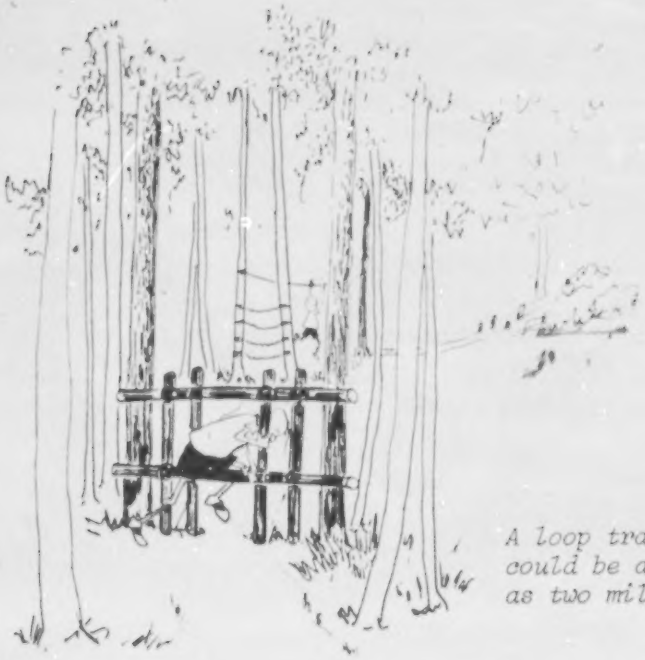
"So far so good!"

An aerial course can be just a few inches from the ground.



"Hey! How do I do this?" ...
--"However you want."

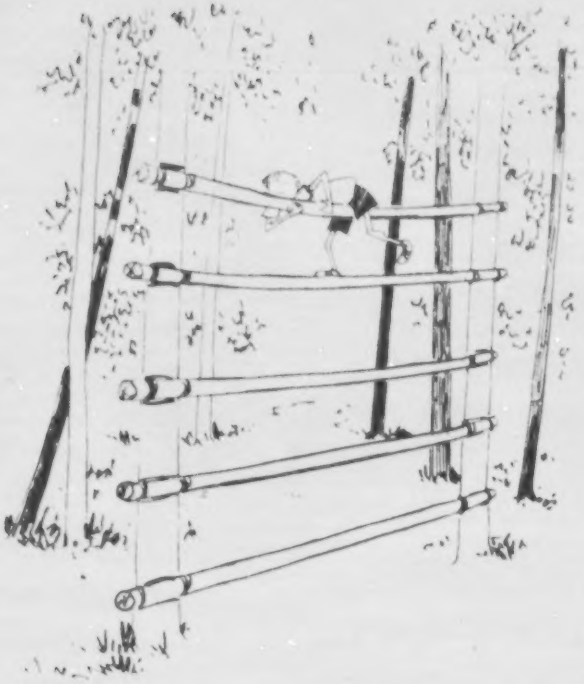
GROUND COURSE



A loop trail that could be as long as two miles.

Every 50 yards or so, an apparatus is planned.

A ground course is used while jogging.



"Next time, 'snake' through it, or go down head first."

Slalom gates.

Probably out of place, but fun.

"That's the checker board?"
"Yep!"

"...now, this one is easy!"

THE APPARATUS

Hébert wrote extensively on each natural movement. As a matter of fact he had books published and entitled "Grimper", "Equilibrisme", "Lancer" and so on.

This type of classification has been judged as being of little scientific value in the current study of human motion. It is however very useful in designing a hébertisme course. It allows a more systematic approach in attempting to alternate the type of physical work or experiences along a circuit.

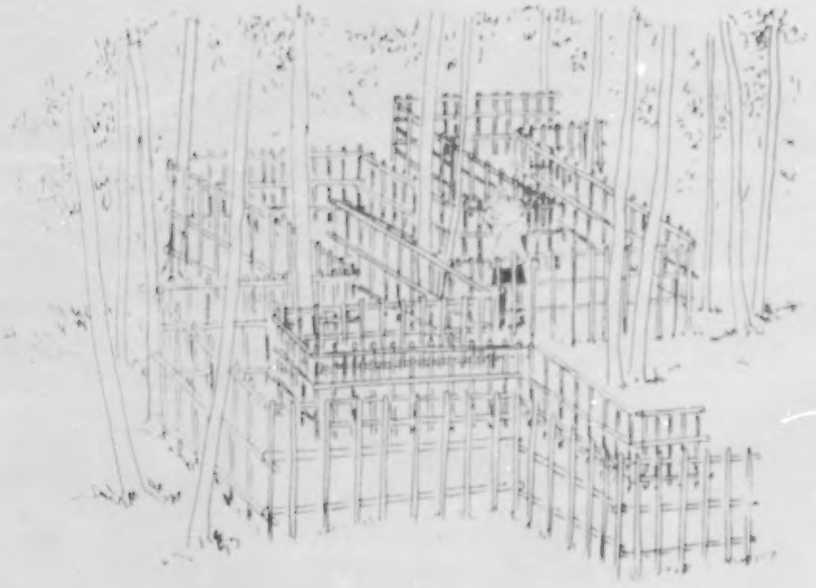
Therefore, each apparatus, station or obstacle can more or less be classified according to the type of movement it stimulates. The following classification is suggested:

1) Walking and running
2) Balancing
3) Crawling and on all fours
4) Lifting, carrying and throwing
5) Jumping
6) Arm-supporting
7) Suspension
8) Climbing
9) The thrillers

WALKING AND RUNNING

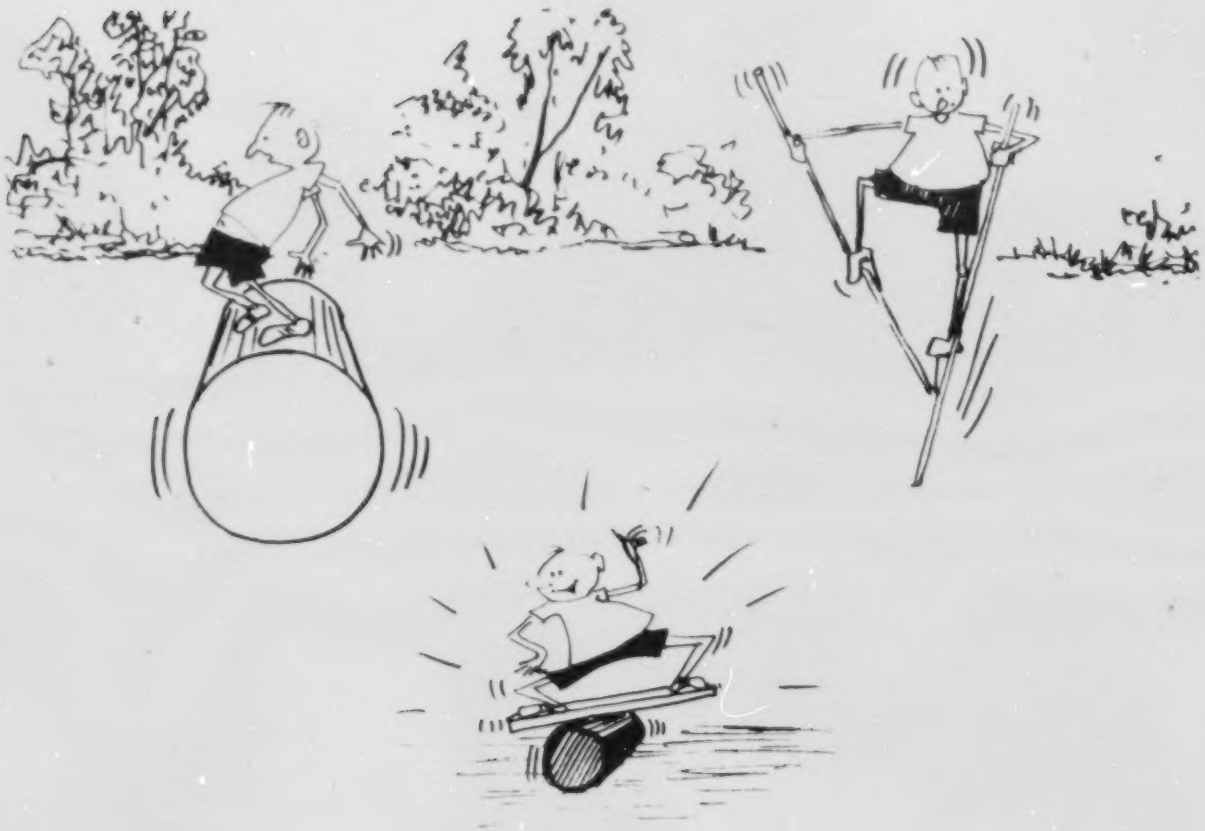
Any "excuse" to provoke walking or running.

Running with a problem.



Running into a problem.

BALANCING



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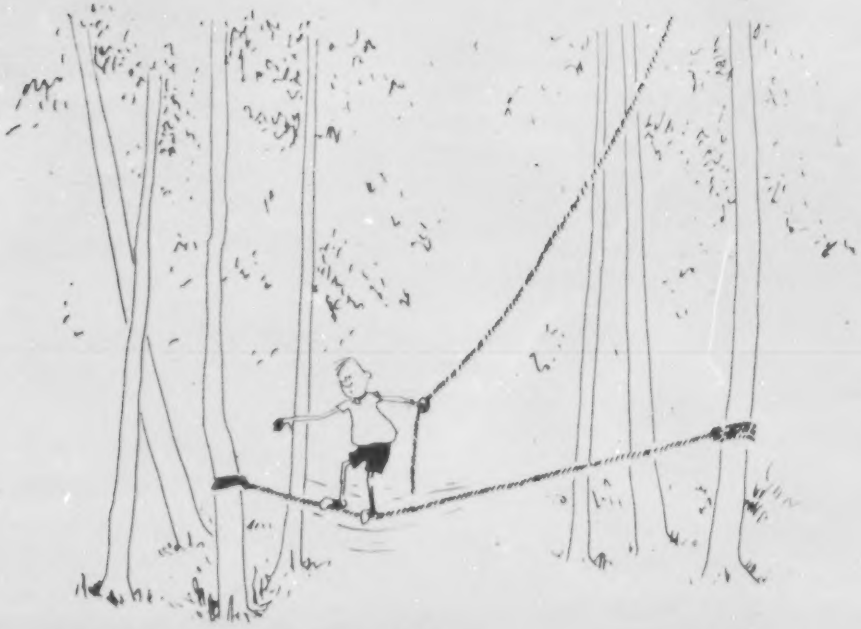
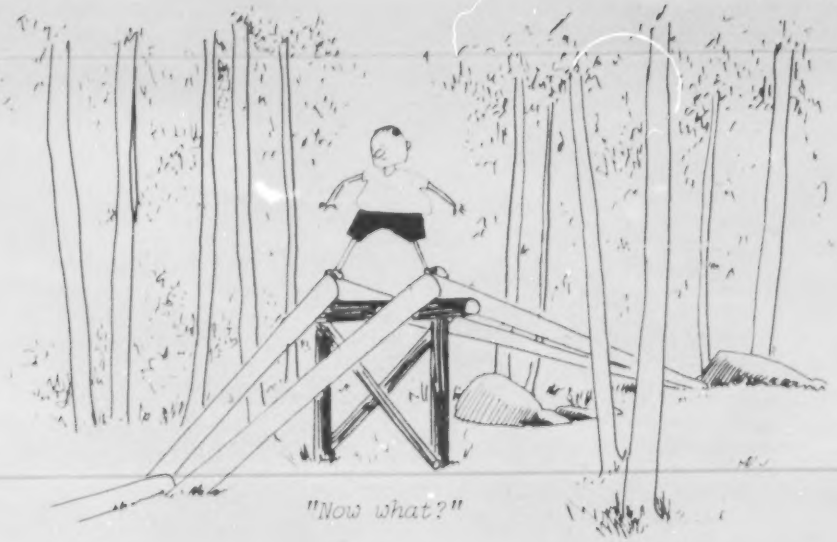


"Hey! Now! That's hard!"

56

"Hmm!"



"Now what?"

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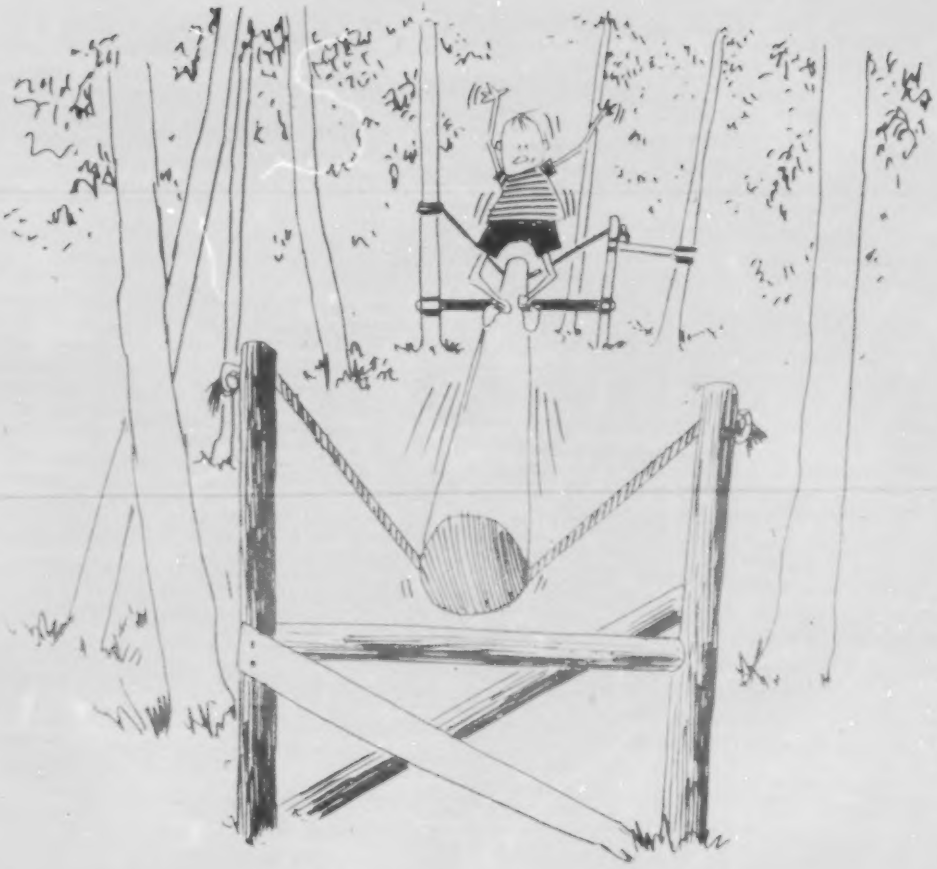
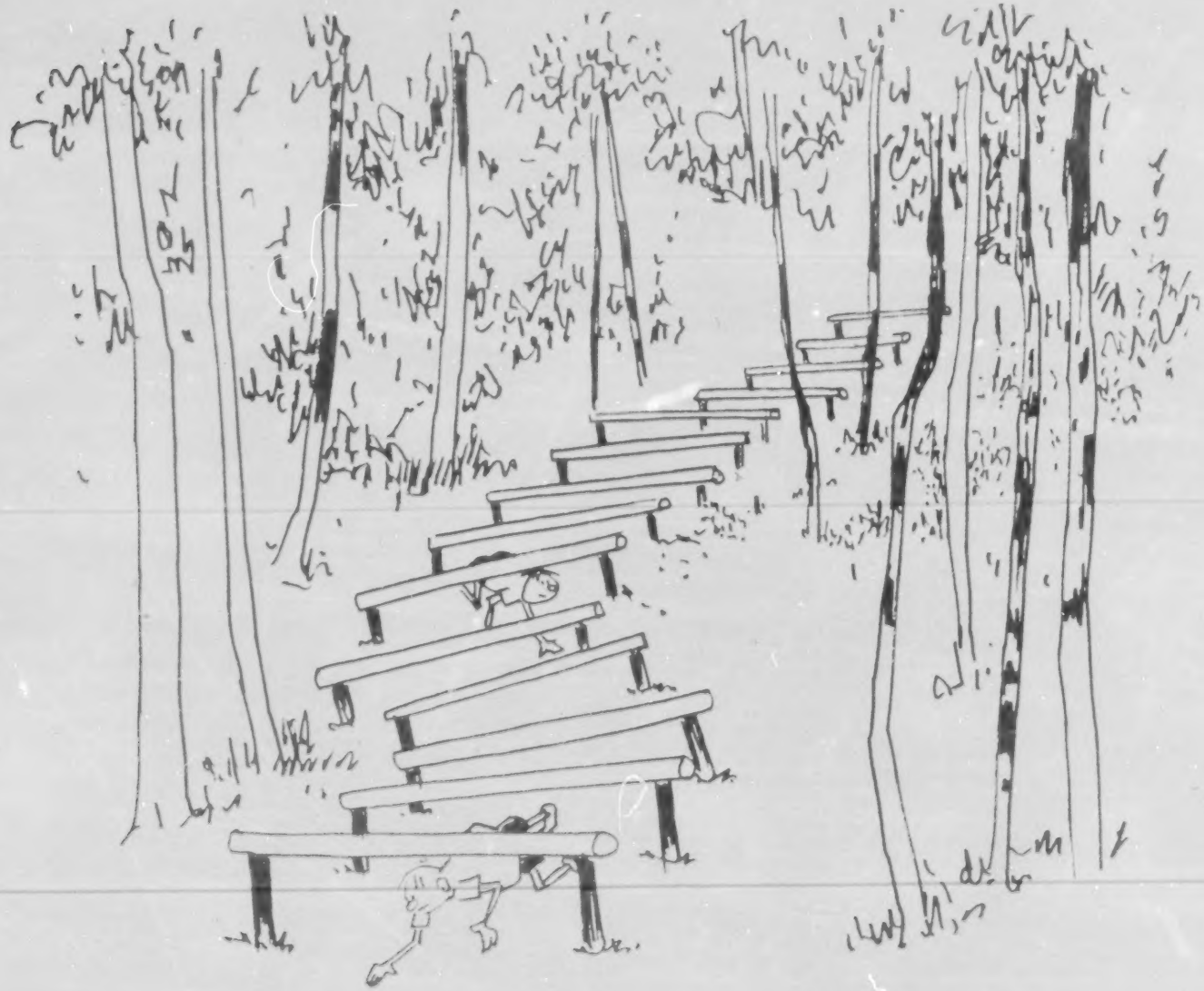
"Oh! Oh!"

"... dum, de-dum, dum ...."



"Oh no! That's too much!"

CRAWLING AND "ON ALL FOURS"



60

61

"Is it true what they say about the bear sleeping there sometimes...?"

28

LIFTING, CARRYING, AND THROWING

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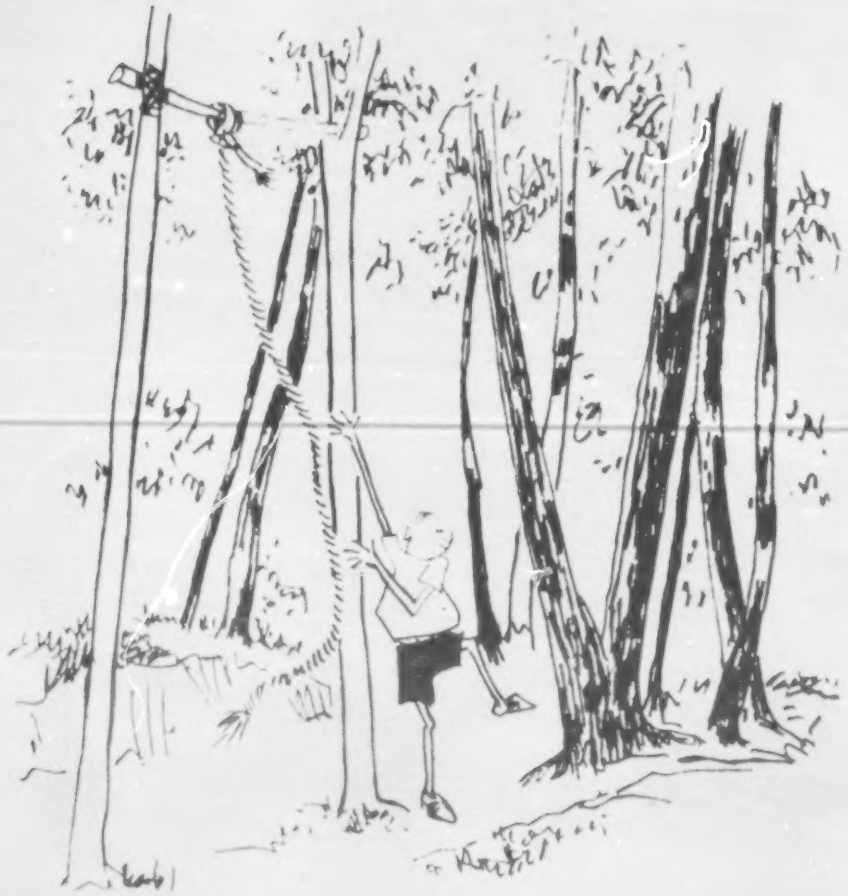
TRANSFER THE
ROCKS TO THE
OTHER POSTS

JUMPING



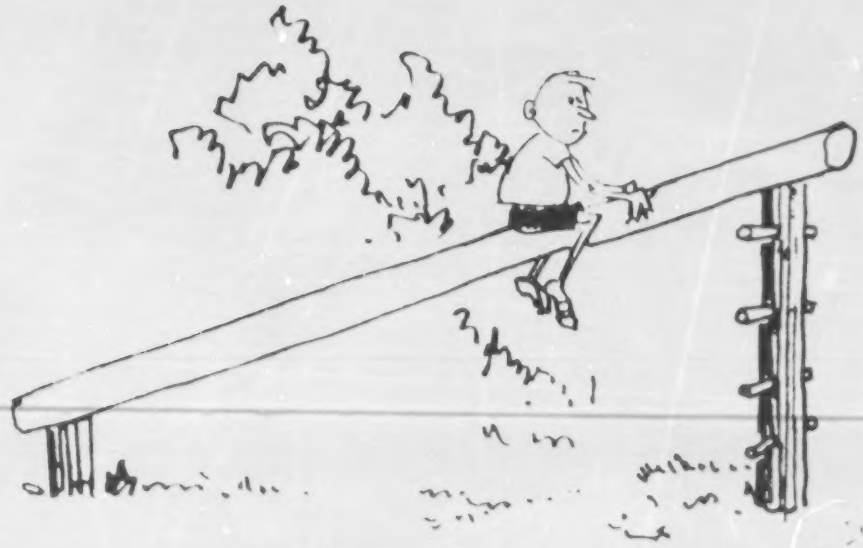
Learning to land is part of jumping.

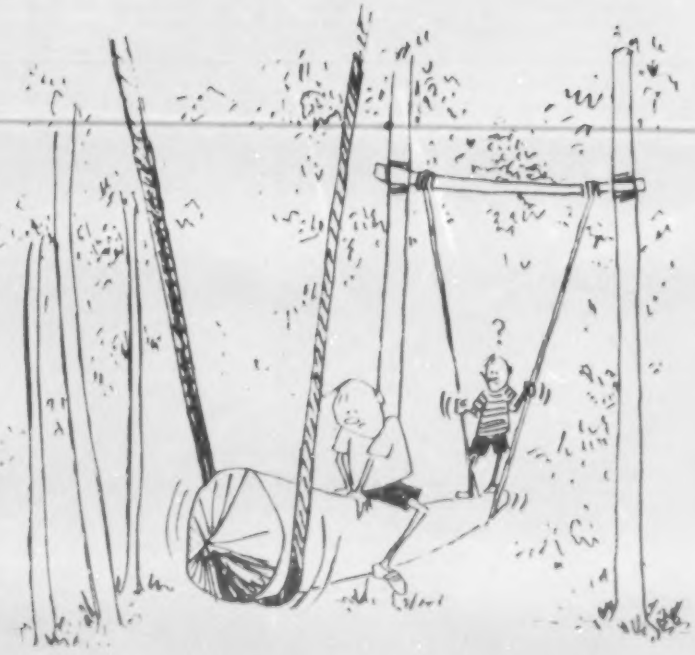
"..up!"

The 'natural' obstacles are probably the best apparatus in hébertisme.

"..up!"

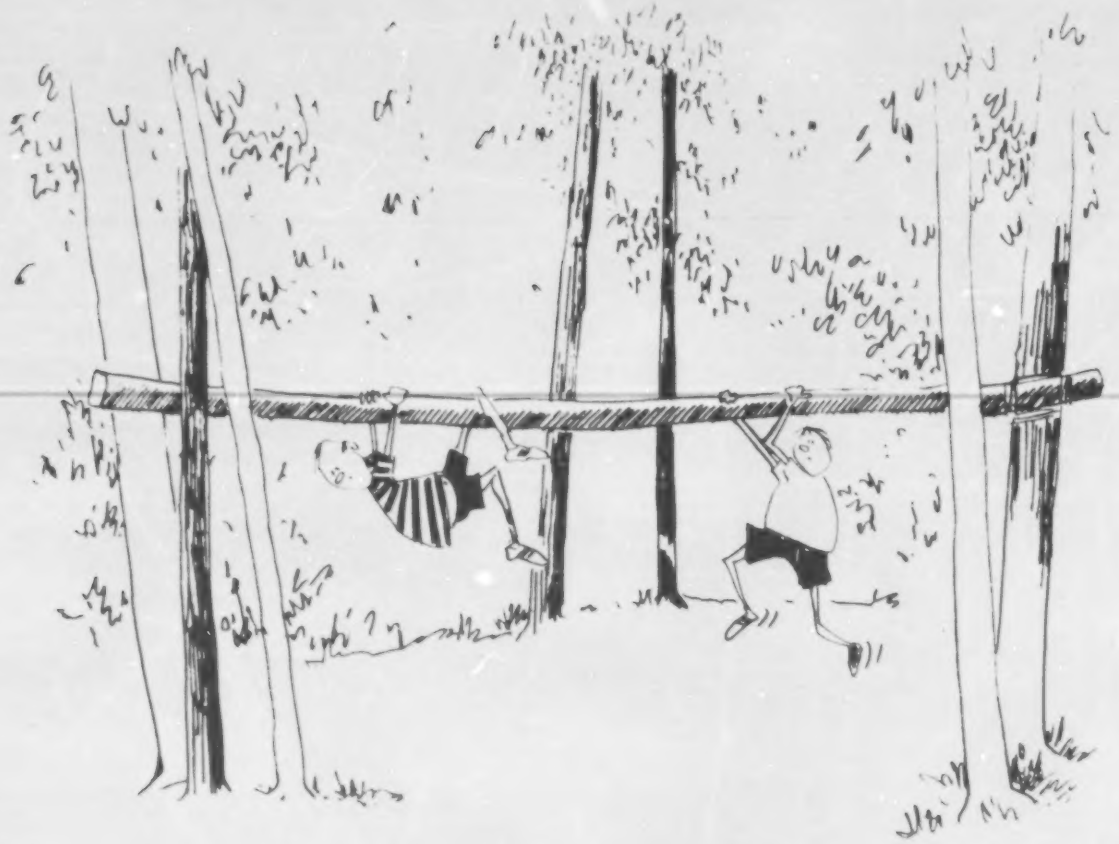
ARM SUPPORTING





"Steady now."

SUSPENSION



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Suspension bars to counteract difficult for wee older girls.

The peg board takes a great deal of strength.

The 'spider's web'.

75

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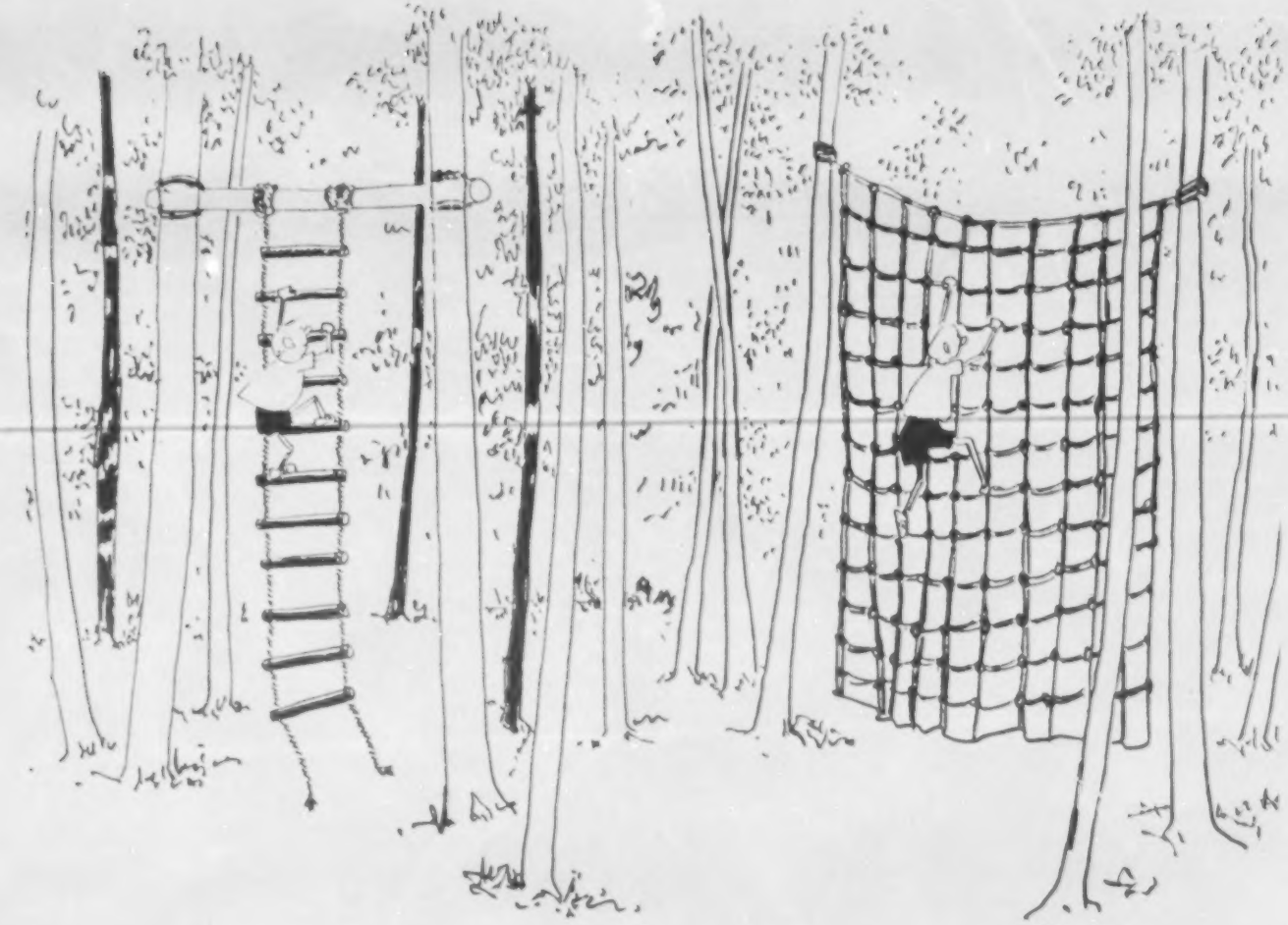
CLIMBING



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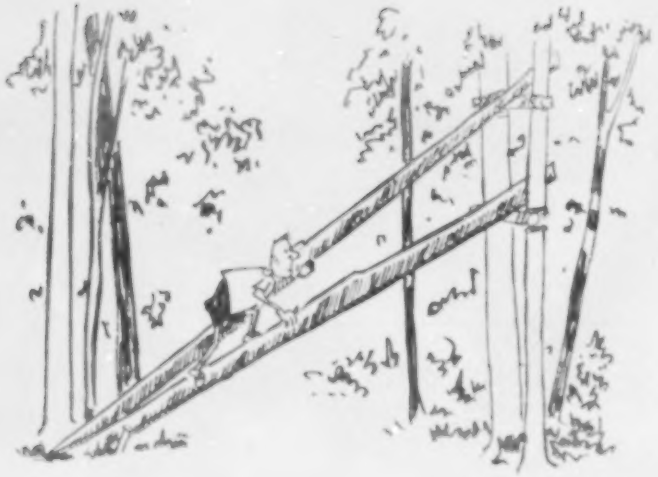

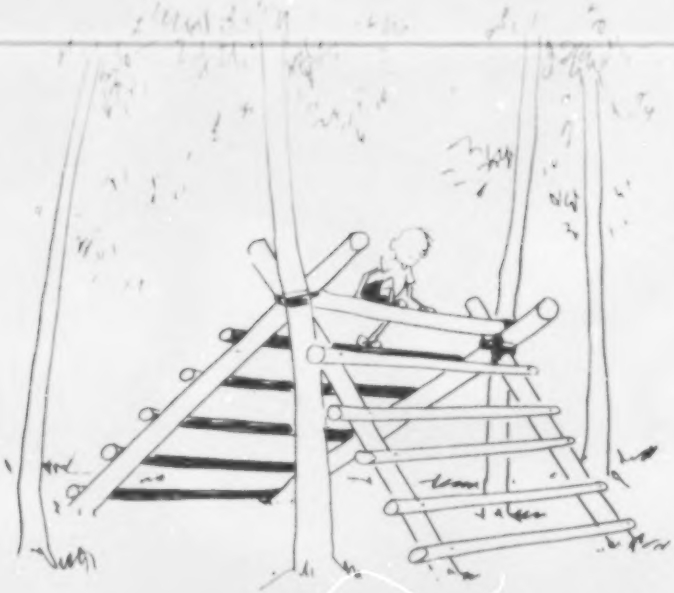

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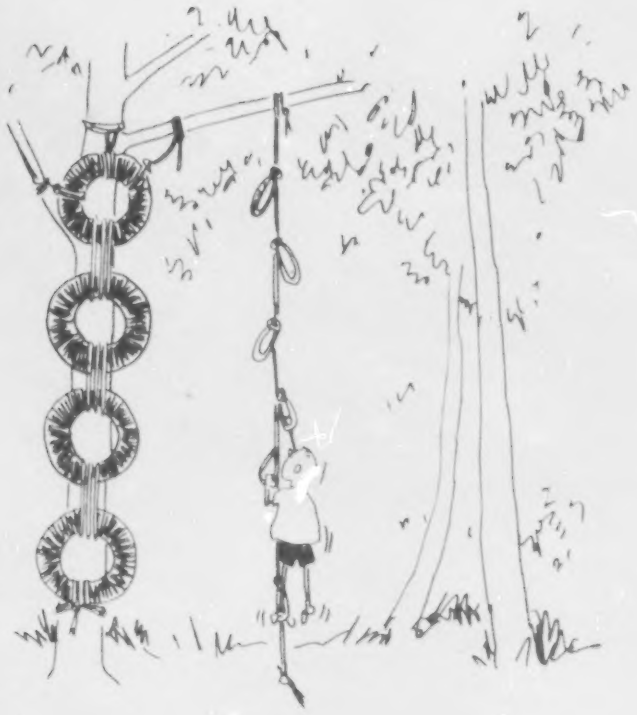
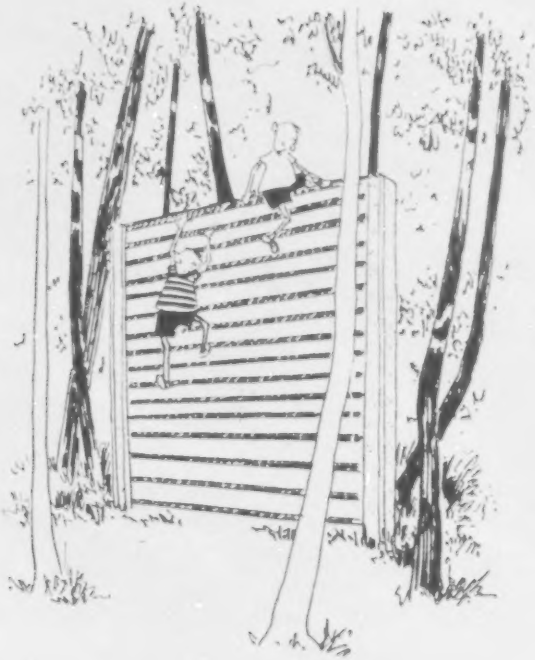
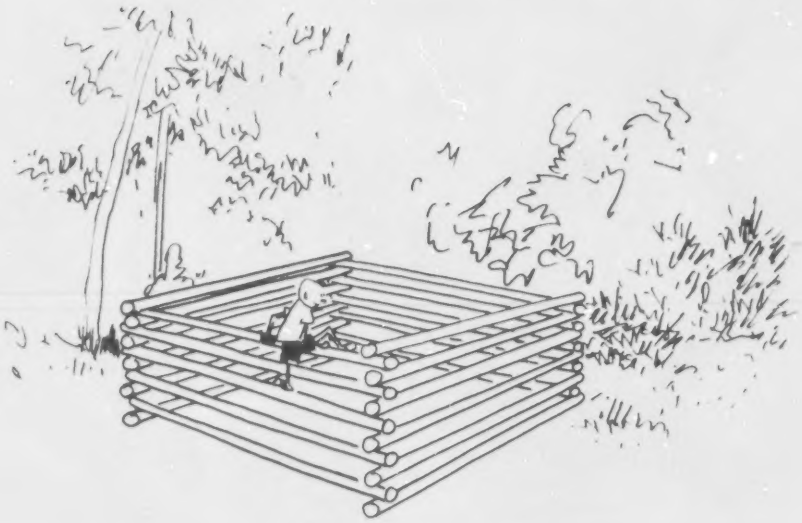




The climbing wall,
made of planks,
is a good preparation
for rock climbing.



The 'bear trap'.

MATERIAL

Once a suitable site has been selected, the cost for material is relatively low. Most hébertisme sites have been constructed by the staff of the outdoor center and, in some instances, with the help of the participants attending the outdoor program.

The main purchase would of course be the manila rope: cables, 1" diameter for rope apparatus and $\frac{1}{2}$" diameter for lashing, have been found satisfactory.

It could be roughly estimated that for an aerial course of 20 stations (where most of the heavy rope would be used) a minimum of 500 feet of 1" rope and 500 feet of $\frac{1}{2}$" rope would be necessary. A few wood beams and planks would be required, in addition to the logs that might have been carefully selected in the forest of the property if these happen to be available.

Some safety devices such as those used in rock climbing would also be a necessary purchase.

SAFETY

The notion of risk as an educational medium, when liability of the sponsoring agency is concerned, must be equated with the necessary safety precautions.

An important element of hébertisme is for the participant to learn how to calculate risk. It is, in a way, a safety education program. Then, during the experimental process of this learning, some safety rules and procedures must be developed and put into practice. For example, one may encounter the following: out of bounds after sundown, only one at a time on the spider's web, use the swinging rope only when a staff member is present, always clip to the safety rope on the rope bridge. Certain outdoor centres even lock some of the apparatus such as the pulley slide.

The rock-climbing techniques of belaying and securing oneself with slings and karabiners should be strongly encouraged on the more challenging apparatus. It should be a must for everyone on the first trial.

The constant checking of the equipment by the instructor in charge is, of course, a must. The camp maintenance man should be involved in the construction and the upkeep of the site. Some shock-absorbent material should be used under certain apparatus; sawdust has been found very satisfactory and economical.

One must remember that the wooden apparatus are slippery when wet.

Having a progression system and an award system serves a twofold purpose. It is a motivational factor as well as a safety precaution. For example, the shaky house is reserved only for those having passed their senior in hébertisme.

Consultation with several camp directors about the safety aspect of having participants playing 10 to 15 feet above the ground reveals a very low record of accidents. One summer camp director summed it up by saying that there are more accidents in front of the dining hall than on the hébertisme site. The few accidents have been noticed to occur during the first day of camp, on parents visitation day and very often at the end of a regular camp day.

Hébertisme is safety education; it's a chance to learn to 'calculate' risk and gain confidence.

PROGRAMME AND PEDAGOGY

A hébertisme site is seldom used more than five or six times by the same group. Otherwise the notion of a new experience becomes less evident. Repetition of the same thing could be monotonous.

It becomes very important that each additional visit to the hébertisme site includes a new approach.

Here is an example of a progression for a group using and aerial course:

1st visit: With very few words of explanation the instructor directs a few participants to station No. 1, a few to station No. 6, a few to station No. 12 and so on. Everyone is invited to follow the course according to the numbers on each station. No race, no pressure, no teaching takes place. Everyone solves his own locomotor problems his own way at his own rhythm. Some may feel that they cannot handle, let's say, station No. 8, they are then advised to proceed on foot to No. 9. If time allows, the participant may be asked to try it again and find better ways of negotiating some of the seemingly difficult apparatus. It is a self-discovery and problem-solving approach. The objective should be to make everyone feel that they have been successful.

2nd visit: Try out the circuit again but with an emphasis on efficiency, minimum energy and rapidity. At this stage the instructor may suggest and demonstrate easier ways on certain apparatus.

3rd visit: The participants may be grouped in units of five to ten and challenged into a series of initiative tests. They may be asked to carry a heavy 20-foot beam for part of the circuit within a given time. Group cohesiveness, co-operation, leadership, creativity and skill will be the factors contributing to a successful operation. This helps a group to get to know each other better. It is a good preparation for a subsequent group expedition, such as a canoe trip.

4th visit: Each participant is invited to try the circuit but with the addition of a specific problem each trial.

Examples:
a) Complete a 360° rotation in the middle of each apparatus.
b) Go in pairs but hold hands throughout the whole circuit.
c) Go with one hand in the pocket.
d) Go and carry a four-foot-long log.
e) Go and try to progress feet-first all the time.

5th visit: Participants are challenged to try the aerial course with their eyes closed. They are first encouraged to walk alongside the course and visually memorize all its intricacies. When they feel ready to begin they proceed, leaving a few minutes interval between each participant.

Some are asked to start further up the course but nevertheless complete it: this is to avoid line-ups.

This exercise is done in total silence. The instructor will place himself at a strategic location; he should help only if requested to do so by the participant. This is an excellent exercise in sensory perception, concentration and memory. The participant usually shows a great deal of relief and satisfaction after having completed the course. The typical comments are: "It was another world", "Wow! what an experience" or "I was totally lost at one point but I kept my eyes shut".

Safety-wise, the participant is in greater security, since all his or her moves are executed slowly, with precision and with great concentration.

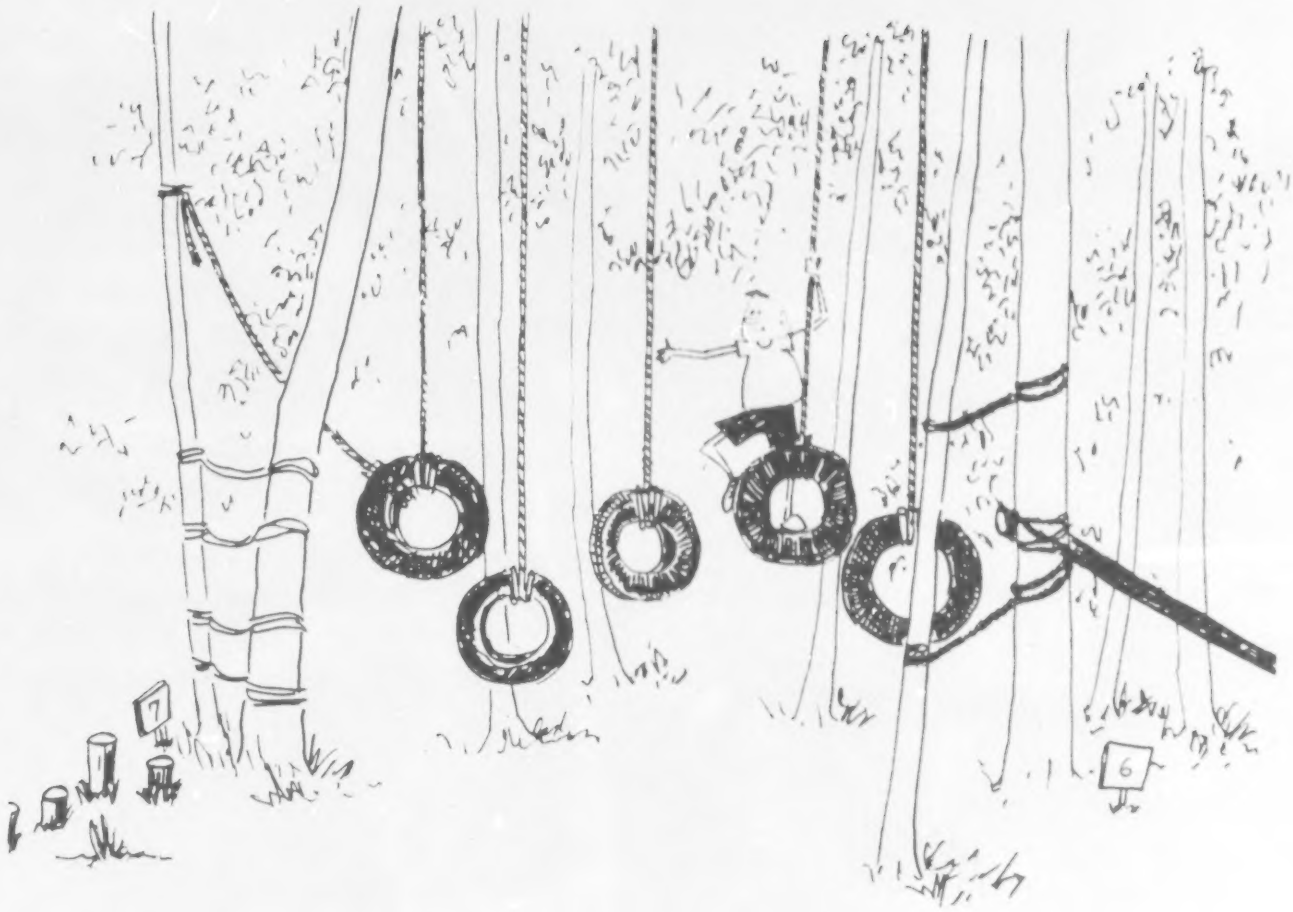
6th visit: For the more skillful, the element of competition can be used. The participants may be asked to travel the circuit in a minimum amount of time. Or, at 10-second intervals, they may be asked to tag the person ahead of them. The instructor should not attach too much importance to this aspect, as very few people feel at ease racing through an aerial course.

All these visits may have been preceeded or followed by the walking or jogging of the ground course.

With young adults, or teenagers in their second season at the same outdoor center, the planning and construction of an apparatus becomes an attractive and interesting learning medium. Our urban children are deprived of the fun and learning of construction. School physical-education programs are, unfortunately, too often limited to sport skills. Learning to use a hand saw, to hammer a 6" nail, to split a log, to estimate the weight and strength of a 10-foot cedar log, etc., is also valuable, mostly for the non-sport-minded individual.

Some outdoor education programs have used hébertisme during the winter with some success. Some special considerations must be given to the facts that the logs might be icy and slippery, the hand grip is affected by the wearing of mitts and the trees and branches are less resistant when cold. Neverthless it is worth trying.

A group problem: a chance to witness initiative, leadership and followship.



On a first visit, there is no race, pressure or even teaching. "Just solve the problem your own way."

With an added problem.

An experience in sensory perception, concentration and visual memory.

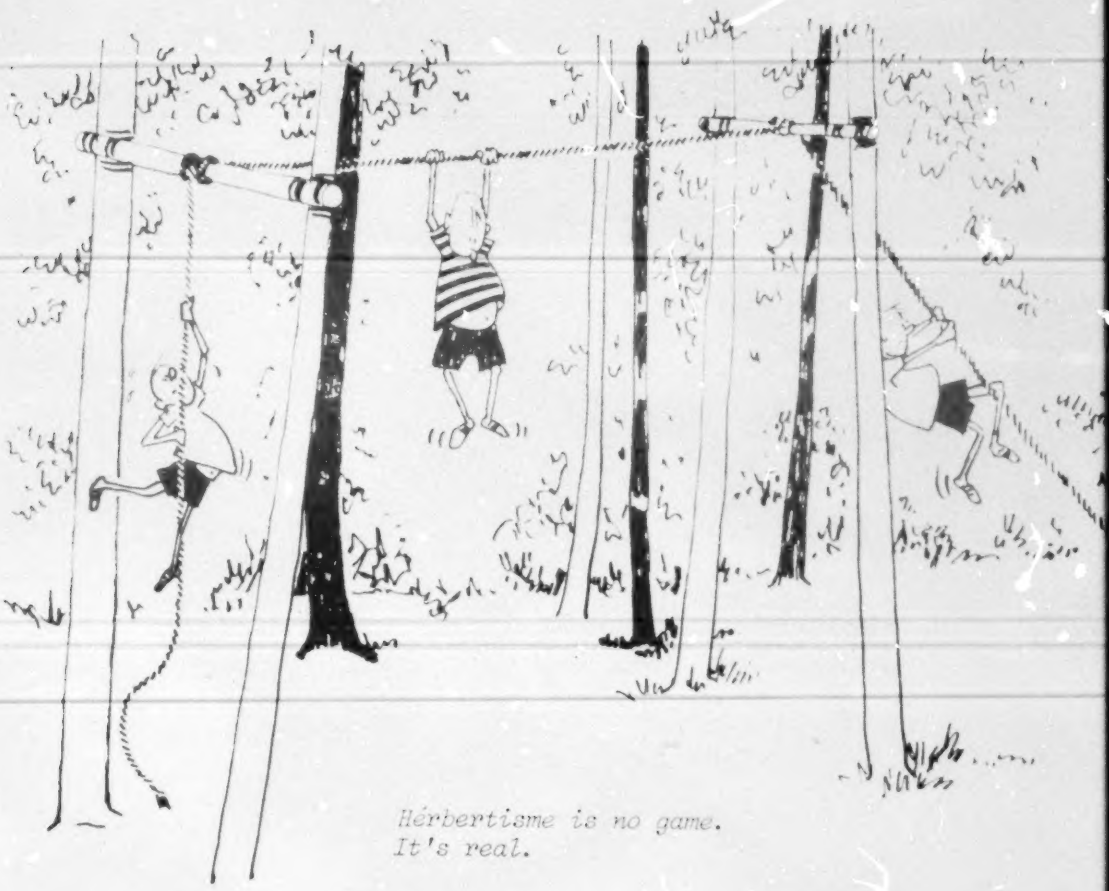
Planning and construction is an interesting learning medium.

CONCLUSION

From a physical training method of the early days, with its biological objectives, hébertisme has since been modified, adapted and integrated in the summer camp program and is becoming more popular in school outdoor-education programs.

Without refuting the physical and health benefits of hébertisme, one can say that its greater contributions are in the areas of self-confidence, movement-expression and understanding one's own capacity. A teacher or group leader wishing to develop these traits in his children, can only do it by exposing them to real-life experiences. Hébertisme is real.

For the participants, hébertisme is nothing but fun and excitement; for the outdoor educator, it is another medium by which one learns to relate to his physical environment.



Hérbertisme is no game.
It's real.

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